

# The Sparkling Stone



by Blessed Jan van Ruysbroek

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# Prologue

The man who would live in the most perfect state of Holy Church must be a good and zealous man; an inward and ghostly man; an uplifted and God-seeing man; and an outflowing man to all in common. Whenever these four things are together in a man, then his state is perfect; and through the increase of grace he shall continually grow and progress in all virtues, and in the knowledge of truth, before God and before all men.



# Through Three Things A Man Becomes Good

Hear now three things which constitute a good man. The first, which a good man must have, is a clean conscience without reproach of mortal sin. And therefore whosoever wishes to become a good man must examine and prove himself with due discernment, from that time onward when he could first have committed sin. And from all these sins he must purge himself, according to the precept and the custom of Holy Church.

The second thing which pertains to a good man is that he must in all things be obedient to God, and to Holy Church, and to his own proper convictions. And to each of these three he must be equally obedient: so shall he live without care and doubt, and shall ever abide without inward reproach in all his deeds.

The third thing which behooves every good man is that in all his deeds he should have in mind, above all else, the glory of God. And if it happens that by reason of his business or the multiplicity of his works, he has not always God before his eyes, yet at least there should be established in him the intention and desire to live according to the dearest will of God.

Behold, these three things, when they are possessed in this way, make a man good. And whosoever lacks any one of these three is neither good nor in the grace of God; but whenever a man resolves in his heart to fulfill these three points, how wicked soever he may have been before, in that very instant he becomes good, and is susceptible of God, and filled with the grace of God.

# Through Three Things A Man Becomes Inward

If, further, this good man would become an inward and ghostly man, he needs must have three further things. The first is a heart unencumbered with images; the second is spiritual freedom in his desires, the third is the feeling of inward union with God.

Now let every one who thinks himself to be ghostly observe himself. He who would have a heart void of images may not possess anything with affection, nor may he cling to any one, or have intercourse with him with attachment of the will; for all intercourse and all affection which do not aim purely at the honour of God bring images into a man's heart, since they are born, not of God, but of the flesh. And so if a man would become spiritual, he must forsake all fleshly lusts and loves and must cleave with longing and love to God alone, and thus possess Him. And through this, all imaginations and all inordinate love towards creatures are cast out. And this loving possession of God makes a man inwardly free from ungodly images; for God is a Spirit, of Whom no one can make to himself a true image. Certainly in this exercise a man should lay hold of good images to help him; such as the Passion of our Lord and all those things that may stir him to greater devotion. But in the possession of God, the man must sink down to that imageless Nudity which is God; and this is the first condition, and the foundation, of a ghostly life.

The second condition is inward freedom. Through this, the man should be able to raise himself towards God in all inward exercises, free from images and encumbrances; that is, in thanksgiving and praise, in worship, in devout prayer

and fervent love, and in all those things that may be done by longing and love with the help of the grace of God and through inward zeal in all ghostly exercises.

Through this inward exercise, he reaches the third state; which is that he feels a ghostly union with God. Whosoever then has, in his inward exercise, an imageless and free ascent unto his God, and means nought else but the glory of God, must taste of the goodness of God; and he must feel from within a true union with God. And in this union, the inward and spiritual life is made perfect; for in this union, the desirous power is perpetually enticed anew and stirred to new inward activity. And by each act, the spirit rises upwards to a new union. And so activity and union perpetually renew themselves; and this perpetual renewal in activity and in union is a ghostly life. And so you are now able to see how a man becomes good through the moral virtues and an upright intention; and how he may become ghostly through the inward virtues and union with God. But without these said points, he can neither be good nor ghostly.

## Through Three Things A Man Becomes God-Seeing

Further, you must know that if this ghostly man would now become a God-seeing man, he needs must have three other things. The first is the feeling that the foundation of his being is abysmal, and he should possess it in this manner; the second is that his inward exercise should be wayless; the third is that his indwelling should be a divine fruition.

Now understand, you who would live in the spirit, for I am speaking to no one else. The union with God which a spiritual man feels, when the union is revealed to the spirit as being abysmal—that is, measureless depth, measureless height, measureless length and measureless breadth—in this manifestation the spirit perceives that through love it has plunged itself into the depth and has ascended into the height and escaped into the length; and it feels itself to be wandering in the breadth, and to dwell in a knowledge which is ignorance. And through this intimate feeling of union, it feels itself to be melting into the Unity; and, through dying to all things, into the life of God. And there it feels itself to be one life with God. And this is the foundation, and the first point, of the God-seeing life.

And from this there arises the second point, which is an exercise above reason and without condition: for the Divine Unity, of which every God-seeing spirit has entered into possession in love, eternally draws and invites the Divine Persons and all loving spirits into its self. And this inward drawing is felt by each lover, more or less, according to the measure of his love and the manner of his exercise. And whosoever yields himself to this indrawing, and keeps himself therein, cannot fall into mortal sin. But the God-

seeing man who has forsaken self and all things, and does not feel himself drawn away because he no longer possesses anything as his own, but stands empty of all, he can always enter, naked and unencumbered with images, into the inmost part of his spirit. There he finds revealed an Eternal Light, and in this light, he feels the eternal demand of the Divine Unity; and he feels himself to be an eternal fire of love, which craves above all else to be one with God. The more he yields to this indrawing or demand, the more he feels it. And the more he feels it, the more he craves to be one with God; for it urges him to pay the debt which is demanded of him by God. This eternal demand of the Divine Unity kindles within the spirit an eternal fire of love; and though the spirit incessantly pays the debt, an eternal burning continues within it. For, in the transformation within the Unity, all spirits fail in their own activity, and feel nothing else but a burning up of themselves in the simple Unity of God. This simple Unity of God none can feel or possess save he who maintains himself in the immeasurable radiance, and in the love which is above reason and wayless. In this transcendent state the spirit feels in itself the eternal fire of love; and in this fire of love it finds neither beginning nor end, and it feels itself one with this fire of love. The spirit for ever continues to burn in itself, for its love is eternal; and it feels itself ever more and more to be burnt up in love, for it is drawn and transformed into the Unity of God, where the spirit burns in love. If it observes itself, it finds a distinction and an otherness between itself and God; but where it is burnt up it is undifferentiated and without distinction, and therefore it feels nothing but unity; for the flame of the Love of God consumes and devours all that it can enfold in its Self.

And thus you may see that the indrawing Unity of God is nought else than the fathomless Love, which lovingly draws inward, in eternal fruition, the Father and the Son and all

that lives in Them. And in this Love we shall burn and be burnt up without end, throughout eternity; for herein lies the blessedness of all spirits. And therefore we must all found our lives upon a fathomless abyss; that we may eternally plunge into Love, and sink down in the fathomless Depth. And with that same Love, we shall ascend, and transcend ourselves, in the incomprehensible Height. And in that Love which is wayless, we shall wander and stray, and it shall lead us and lose us in the immeasurable Breadth of the Love of God. And herein we shall flee forth and flee out of ourselves, into the unknown raptures of the Goodness and Riches of God. And therein we shall melt and be melted away, and shall eternally wander and sojourn within the Glory of God. Behold! by each of these images, I show forth to God-seeing men their being and their exercise, but none else can understand them. For the contemplative life cannot be taught. But where the Eternal Truth reveals Itself within the spirit all that is needful is taught and learnt.

# **Of The Sparkling Stone, and of The New Name Written In The Book of The Secrets of God**

And therefore the Spirit of our Lord speaks thus in the Book of the Secrets of God, which Saint John wrote down: to him that overcometh, He says, that is, to him who overcometh and conquereth himself and all else, will I give to eat of the hidden manna, that is, an inward and hidden savour and celestial joy; and will give him a sparkling stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. This stone is called a pebble, for it is so small that it does not hurt when one treads on it. This stone is shining white and red like a flame of fire; and it is small and round, and smooth all over, and very light. By this sparkling stone we mean our Lord Christ Jesus, for He is, according to His Godhead, a shining forth of the Eternal Light, and an irradiation of the glory of God, and a flawless mirror in which all things live. Now to him who overcomes and transcends all things, this sparkling stone is given; and with it he receives light and truth and life. This stone is also like to a fiery flame, for the fiery love of the Eternal Word has filled the whole world with love and wills that all loving spirits be burned up to nothingness in love. This stone is also so small that a man hardly feels it, even though he treads it underfoot. And that is why it is called calculus, that is, "treadling." And this is made clear to us by St Paul, where he says that the Son of God emptied Himself, and humbled Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And He Himself spoke through the mouth of the Prophet, saying: I am a worm, and no man: a reproach of men and despised of the people. And He made Himself so small in

time that the Jews trod Him under their feet. But they felt Him not; for, had they recognized the Son of God, they had not dared to crucify Him. He is still little and despised in all men's hearts that do not love Him well. This noble stone of which I speak is wholly round and smooth and even all over. That the stone is round teaches us that the Divine Truth has neither beginning nor end; that it is smooth and even all over teaches us that the Divine Truth shall weigh all things evenly, and shall give to each according to his merits; and that which he gives shall be with each throughout eternity. The last property of this stone of which I will speak is, that it is particularly light; for the Eternal Word of the Father has no weight, nevertheless It bears heaven and earth by Its strength. And It is equally near to all things; yet none can attain It, for It is set on high and goes before all creatures, and reveals Itself where It wills and when It wills; and, in Its lightness, our heavy human nature has climbed above all the heavens, and sits crowned at the right hand of the Father.

Behold, this is the sparkling stone which is given to the God-seeing man, and in this stone a new name is written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. You should know that all spirits in their return towards God receive names; each one in particular, according to the nobleness of its service and the loftiness of its love. For only the first name of innocence, which we receive at baptism, is adorned with the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when we have lost this name of innocence through sin, if we are willing still to follow God—especially in three works which He wishes to work in us—we are baptized once more in the Holy Ghost. And thereby we receive a new name which shall remain with us throughout eternity.

# **Of The Works Which God Works In All In Common And Of Five Kinds Of Sinners**

Hear now what those three works are, which our Lord works in all men if they will submit themselves thereto. The first work which God works in all men in common consists in His calling and inviting them all, without exception, to union with Himself. And as long as a sinner does not follow this call, he must lack all the other gifts which would follow thereafter.

Now I have observed that all sinners may be divided into five kinds. To the first kind belong all those who are careless of good works, who through bodily ease and the lust of the senses prefer to live in worldly employments and in multiplicity of heart. All such are unfit to receive the grace of God, and even if they had received it, they would not be able to keep it.

To the second kind belong those who have willingly and wittingly fallen into mortal sin, yet also do good works, and dwell in the fear and awe of the Lord, and love the just, and desire their prayers, and put their trust therein. So long, however, as turning from God and love of sin vanquish and repulse love of God and turning to God, so long these remain unworthy of the grace of God.

The third kind of sinners consists in all unbelievers, and those who err in faith. What good works soever they do, or what lives soever they lead, without the true faith they cannot please God; for true faith is the foundation of all holiness and all virtues.

To the fourth kind belong those who abide in mortal sin without fear and without shame, who care not for God and His gifts, and neglect all virtues. They hold all ghostly life to be hypocrisy and deceit; and they hardly listen to all that one may say to them of God or of the virtues, for they have established themselves as though there were no God, nor heaven, nor hell, and therefore they desire to know of nothing but that which they now perceive and have before them. Behold, all such are rejected and despised by God, for they sin against the Holy Ghost. Yet they may be converted; but this happens with difficulty and seldom.

The fifth kind of sinners are those hypocrites who do outward good works, not for the glory of God and their own salvation, but to acquire a name for holiness or for the sake of some fleeting thing. Though they may appear holy and good from without, within they are false and turned away from God, and they lack the grace of God and every virtue.

See, I have shown to you five kinds of sinners, who have all been inwardly called to union with God. But so long as a sinner remains in the service of sin, so long he remains deaf and blind and unable to taste, or to feel, all the good that God wishes to work in him. But whenever a sinner enters into himself, and considers himself, if he be displeased by his sinful life, then he draws near to God. But if he would be obedient to the call and the words of God, he must of his own free will resolve to leave sin and to do penance. And so he becomes one aim and one will with God, and receives the grace of God.

And therefore we should all conceive of God in this way: First of all that, of His free goodness, He calls and invites all men, without distinction, to union with Himself; both the good and the wicked, without exception. Secondly, we should thus comprehend the goodness of God; how He through

grace flows forth towards all men who are obedient to the call of God. Thirdly, we should find and understand clearly in ourselves that we can become one life and one spirit with God, when we renounce ourselves in every way, and follow the grace of God to the height whereto it would guide us. For the grace of God works according to order in every man, after the measure and the way in which he is able to receive it. And thereby, through the universal working of the grace of God, every sinner, if he desires it, receives the discernment and strength which are needful, that he may leave sin and turn towards virtue. And, through that hidden cooperation of the grace of God, every good man can overcome all sins, and can resist all temptations, and can fulfil all virtues, and can persevere in the highest perfection, if he be in all things submissive to the grace of God. For all that we are, and all that we have received, from without and from within, these are all the free gifts of God; for which we must thank and praise Him, and with which we must serve Him, if we are to please Him. But there are many gifts of God which are for the good an aid to, and a source of, virtue; but for the wicked an aid to, and an occasion of, sin: such are health, beauty, wisdom riches, and worldly dignity. These are the lowest and least precious gifts of God, which God gives for the benefit of all, to His friends and to His enemies, to the good and to the wicked. And with these the good serve God and His friends; but the wicked, their own flesh, and the devil, and the world.

# **Of The Difference Between The Hirelings and The Faithful Servants of God**

Now you may mark this: that some men receive the gifts of God as hirelings, but others as faithful servants of God; and these differ one from another in all inward works, that is, in love and intention, in feeling and in every exercise of the inward life.

Now understand this well: all those who love themselves so inordinately that they will not serve God, save for their own profit and because of their own reward, these separate themselves from God, and dwell in bondage and in their own selfhood; for they seek, and aim at, their own, in all that they do. And therefore, with all their prayers and with all their good works, they seek after temporal things, or may be strive after eternal things for their own benefit and for their own profit. These men are bent upon themselves in an inordinate way; and that is why they ever abide alone with themselves, for they lack the true love which would unite them with God and with all His beloved. And although these men seem to keep within the law and the commandments of God and of Holy Church, they do not keep within the law of love; for all that they do, they do, not out of love, but from sheer necessity, lest they shall be damned. And, because they are inwardly unfaithful, they dare not trust in God; but their whole inward life is doubt and fear, travail and misery. For they see on the right hand eternal life, and this they are afraid of losing; and they see on the left hand the eternal pains of hell, and these they are afraid of gaining. But all their prayers, all their labour and all the good works, whatsoever they do, to cast out this fear, help them not; for the more inordinately they love themselves, the more they

fear hell. And from this you may learn that their fear of hell springs from self-love, which seeks its own.

Now the Prophet, and also the Preacher, say: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; but by this is meant that fear which is exercised upon the right side, where one considers the loss of eternal blessedness, for this fear arises from the natural tendency which every man has in himself to be blessed, that is, to see God. And therefore, even though a man may be faithless to God, yet whenever he truly observes himself from within, he feels himself to be leaning out from himself towards that blessedness which is God. And this blessedness he fears to lose; for he loves himself better than God, and he loves blessedness wholly for his own sake. And therefore he dare not trust in God. And yet this is that Fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom and is a law to the unfaithful servants of God: for it compels a man to leave sin, and to strive after virtue, and to do good deeds, and these things prepare a man from without to receive the grace of God and become a faithful servant.

But from that very hour in which, with God's help, he can overcome his selfhood - that is to say when he is so detached from himself that he is able to leave in the keeping of God everything of which he has need - behold, through doing this he is so well pleasing to God that God bestows upon him His grace. And, through grace, he feels true love: and love casts out doubt and fear, and fills the man with hope and trust, and thus he becomes a faithful servant, and means and loves God in all that he does. Behold, this is the difference between the faithful servant and the hireling.

# **Of The Difference Between The Faithful Servants and The Secret Friends of God**

We must now observe the great difference which there is between the faithful servants and the inward friends of God. For through grace and the help of God, the faithful servants have chosen to keep the commandments of God, that is, to be obedient to God and Holy Church in all virtues and goodly behaviour: and this is called the outward or active life. But the inward friends of God choose to follow, besides the commandments, the quickening counsels of God, and this is a loving and inward cleaving to God for the sake of His eternal glory, with a willing abandonment of all that one may possess outside God with lust and love. All such friends God calls and invites inwards, and He teaches them the distinctions of inward exercises and many a hidden way of ghostly life. But He sends His servants outwards, that they may be faithful to Him and to His House in every service and in every kind of outward good works.

Behold, thus God gives His grace and His help to each man according to his fitness; that is, according to the way in which he is in tune with God, whether in outward good works or in the inward practice of love. But none can do and feel the inward exercises unless he be wholly turned inward to God. For as long as a man is divided of heart, so long he looks outwards, and is unstable of mind, and is easily swayed by joy and grief in temporal things, for these are still alive within him. And though he may live according to the commandments of God, inwardly he abides in darkness, and knows not what inward exercises may be, nor how these should be practised. But, since he knows and feels that he has God in mind, and in all his works desires to fulfill His

dearest will, with this he may be content; for then he knows himself to be free from hypocrisy in his intention, and faithful in his service. And by these two things he contents himself; and it seems to him that outward good works done with a pure intention are more holy and more profitable than any inward exercise whatever, for by the help of God, he has chosen an outward active way of virtue. And therefore he had rather exercise himself in the diversity of outward works than serve with inward love that same One for Whom he works. And that is the cause why his mind is more filled with the works which he does, than with God, for Whom he does them. And through this tendency to images in his works, he remains an outward man, and is not able to follow the counsels of God; for his exercise is more outward than inward, more of the senses than of the spirit. Though he is indeed a faithful servant of God in outward works, yet that which the secret friends of God experience remains hidden from, and unknown to him. And this is why certain gross and outward men always condemn and blame the inward and contemplative men, because they have in mind that these are idle. And this was also the reason why Martha complained to our Lord of her sister Mary, because she did not help her in serving; for she believed that she was doing much service and much usefulness, and that her sister was sitting idle and doing nothing. But our Lord gave His judgment and decided between them: He did not blame Martha for her diligence, for her service was good and useful; but He blamed her for her care, and because she was troubled and cast down by a multitude of outward things. And He praised Mary for her inward exercise, and said that One Thing was needful, and that she had chosen the better part, which should not be taken away from her.

That One Thing which is needful for all men is Divine love. The better part is an inward life, with loving adherence to God. This Mary Magdalen had chosen, and this is chosen by

the secret friends of God. But Martha chose an outward, unenclosed, and active life; and that is the other part, in which one may serve God, but which is neither so perfect nor so good. And this part is chosen out of love by the faithful servants of God.

But there are found some foolish men who would be so inward that they would neither act nor serve, even in those things of which their neighbour has need. Behold, these are neither secret friends nor faithful servants of God; but they are altogether false and deceived. For no man can follow the counsels of God who will not keep His commandments. And therefore all secret friends of God are also at the same time faithful servants, wherever this is needful; but all the faithful servants are not secret friends, for the exercise which belongs thereto is unknown to them.

This is the difference between the faithful servants and the secret friends of God.

## **Of The Difference Between the Secret Friends and the Hidden Sons of God**

But further we find a more subtle and inward difference, between the secret friends and the hidden sons of God; and yet both these alike by their inward exercise maintain themselves in the Presence of God. But the friends possess their inwardness as an attribute, for they choose the loving adherence to God as best and highest of all that they ever can and will reach: and that is why they cannot with themselves and their own activity penetrate to the imageless Nudity. For they have, as images and intermediaries between God and themselves, their own being and their own activity. And though in their loving adherence they feel united with God, yet, in this union, they always feel a difference and an otherness between God and themselves. For the simple passing into the Bare and Wayless, they do not know and love: and therefore their highest inward life ever remains in Reason and in Ways. And though they have clear understanding and discernment of all virtues that may be conceived, the simple staring with open heart into the Divine Brightness remains unknown of them. And though they feel themselves uplifted to God in a mighty fire of love, yet they keep something of their own selfhood, and are not consumed and burnt to nothingness in the unity of love. And though they may desire to live for ever more in the service of God and to please Him eternally, they will not die in God to all the selfhood of their spirit, and receive from Him a God-formed life. And even though they esteem little and count as nothing all consolation and all rest which may come from without, yet they greatly value the gifts of God, and also their own inward works and the solace and sweetness which they feel within and thus they rest upon the way, and do not so wholly die to themselves,

as to be able to attain the highest beatitude in bare and wayless love. And even if they could practise and apprehend with clear discernment the perfection of loving adherence to God, and all the inward and upward going ways by which one may pass into the Presence of God; yet the wayless passing, and the glorious wandering, in the Superessential Love, wherein neither end, nor beginning, nor way, nor manner, can ever be found, would remain hidden from, and unknown of them.

And so there is a great difference between the secret friends and the hidden sons of God. For the friends feel nought else but a loving and living ascent to God in some wise, but, above this, the sons experience a simple and death-like passing which is in no wise.

The inward life of the friends of our Lord is an upward-striving exercise of love, wherein they desire to remain for ever with their own selfhood; but how one possesses God through bare love above every exercise, in freedom from one's self, this they do not feel. Hence they are always striving upwards towards God in true faith, and await God and eternal blessedness with sincere hope, and are fastened and anchored to God through perfect charity. And therefore good things have befallen them, for they please God, and God is complaisant unto them: yet for all this, they are not assured of eternal life, for they have not entirely died to themselves and to all selfhood. But all those who abide and endure in their exercise and in that turning to God which they have chosen above all else, these God has chosen in eternity, and their names together with their works are written from eternity in the living book of the Providence of God. But those who choose other things, and turn their inward faces away from God toward sin, and endure therein (even though their names were written and known of God because of the temporal righteousness which they had

practised before), their names shall be blotted out and erased from the Book of Life because they did not persevere unto death, and they shall never more be able to taste of God, nor of any fruit which springs from virtue. And therefore we must needs observe ourselves with diligence, and adorn our turning towards God, from within with inward love, and from without with good works: thus we can await in hope and joy the judgment of God and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But could we renounce ourselves, and all selfhood in our works, we should, with our bare and imageless spirit, transcend all things: and, without intermediary, should be led of the Spirit of God into the Nudity. And then we should feel the certainty that we are indeed the sons of God: for as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God, says the Apostle Saint Paul.

Nevertheless, you should know that all good and faithful men are the sons of God; for they are all born of the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God lives in them. And He moves and stirs them - each according to his own capacity - to virtues and good works, wherein they are well pleasing to God. But because of the inequality of their adherence and their exercises, I call some the faithful servants of God and others I call His secret friends, and others again His hidden sons: nevertheless, they are all servants, friends, and sons, for they all serve and love and mean one God, and they live and work only by the free Spirit of God. And God permits and allows that His friends do and leave undone all those things which are not contrary to His commandments; and for those who are bound by the counsels of God, then this bond also is a commandment. And so no one is disobedient or contrary to God save he who does not keep His commandments; but all those things which God commands and forbids in Scripture or by Holy Church, or in our conscience, all these things we must do and leave undone, or else be disobedient to God, and lose His grace. But if we fall into venial sins, this

is suffered both by God and by our reason, for we cannot wholly guard against them. And therefore such failings do not make us disobedient, for they do not drive out the grace of God nor our inward peace: nevertheless, we should always lament such lapses, how small soever they may be, and guard against them with all our might.

And by these words I have explained to you what I said at the beginning: namely, that every man must needs be obedient in all things to God and to Holy Church and to his own conscience; for I do not wish that any should be unjustly offended by my words. And herewith I leave it even as I have said it.

# **How We May Become Hidden Sons of God, and Attain to the God-Seeing Life**

But I still longed to know how we may become hidden sons of God, and may attain to the God-seeing life. And as to this I have apprehended the following. As it has been said before, we must always live and be watchful in all virtues, and beyond all virtues must forsake this life and die in God; for we must die to sin and be born of God into a life of virtue, and we must renounce ourselves and die in God into an eternal life. And as to this ensues the following instruction:

If we are born of the Spirit of God, we are the sons of grace; and so our whole life is adorned with virtues. Thereby we overcome all that is contrary to God; for St John says, Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. In this birth all good men are sons of God. And the Spirit of God kindles and stirs each one of them in particular to those virtues and to those good works for which he is in readiness and of which he is capable. And so they please God all in common, and each in particular, according to the measure of his love and the nobleness of his exercise; nevertheless, they do not feel established nor possessed of God, nor assured of eternal life, for they may still turn away and fall into sin. And that is why I call them rather servants and friends, than sons. But when we transcend ourselves, and become in our ascent towards God, so simple that the naked love in the height can lay hold of us, where love enfolds love, above every exercise of virtue - that is, in our Origin, of Which we are spiritually born - then we cease, and we and all our selfhood die in God. And in this death we become hidden sons of God, and find a new life within us: and that is

eternal life And of these sons, St Paul says: You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Now understand, the explanation of this is as follows. In our approach to God, we must carry with us ourselves and all our works, as a perpetual sacrifice to God; and in the Presence of God, we must forsake ourselves and all our works, and, dying in love, go forth from all creatureliness into the superessential richness of God: there we shall possess God in an eternal death to ourselves. And that is why the Spirit of God says in the book of the Divine Secrets: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. Justly He calls them the blessed dead, for they remain eternally dead and lost to themselves in the fruitive Unity of God. And they die in love ever anew, through the indrawing transformation of that same Unity. Further, the Spirit of God says: They may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. In the ordinary state of grace, when we are born of God into a ghostly and virtuous life, we carry our works before us, as an offering to God; but in the wayless state, where we die back into God in an eternal and blessed life, there our good works follow us, for they are one life with us. When we go towards God by means of the virtues, God dwells in us; but when we go out from ourselves and from all else, then we dwell in God. So soon as we have faith, hope and charity, we have received God, and He dwells in us with His grace, and He sends us out as His faithful servants, to keep His commandments. And He calls us in again as His secret friends, so soon as we are willing to follow His counsels; and He names us openly as His sons so soon as we live in opposition to the world. But if above all things we would taste God, and feel eternal life in ourselves, we must go forth into God with our feeling, above reason; and there we must abide, onefold, empty of ourselves, and free from images, lifted up by love into the simple bareness of our intelligence. For when we go out in love beyond and above all things, and

die to all observation in ignorance and in darkness, then we are wrought and transformed through the Eternal Word, Who is the Image of the Father. In this idleness of our spirit, we receive the Incomprehensible Light, which enwraps us and penetrates us, as the air is penetrated by the light of the sun. And this Light is nothing else than a fathomless staring and seeing. What we are, that we behold; and what we behold, that we are: for our thought, our life, and our being are uplifted in simplicity, and made one with the Truth which is God. And therefore in this simple staring we are one life and one spirit with God: and this I call a contemplative life. As soon as we cleave to God through love, we practise the better part; but when we gaze thus into our superessence, we possess God utterly. With this contemplation, there is bound up an exercise which is wayless, that is to say, a noughting of life; for, where we go forth out of ourselves into darkness and the abysmal Waylessness, there shines perpetually the simple ray of the Splendour of God, in which we are grounded, and which draws us out of ourselves into the superessence, and into the immersion of love. And with this sinking into love there is always bound up a practice of love which is wayless; for love cannot be lazy, but would search through and through and taste through and through the fathomless richness which lives in the ground of her being, and this is a hunger which cannot be appeased. But a perpetual striving after the unattainable - this is swimming against the stream. One can neither leave it nor grasp it, neither do without it nor attain it, neither be silent on it nor speak of it, for it is above reason and understanding, and it transcends all creatures; and therefore we can never reach nor overtake it. But we should abide within ourselves: there we feel that the Spirit of God is driving us and enkindling us in this restlessness of love. And we should abide above ourselves. And then we feel that the Spirit of God is drawing us out of ourselves and burning us to nothingness in His Selfhood; that is, in the Superessential Love with which we

are one, and which we possess more deeply and more widely than all else.

This possession is a simple and abysmal tasting of all good and of eternal life; and in this tasting we are swallowed up above reason and without reason, in the deep Quiet of the Godhead, which is never moved. That this is true we can only know by our own feeling, and in no other way. For how this is, or where, or what, neither reason nor practice can come to know: and therefore our ensuing exercise always remains wayless, that is, without manner. For that abysmal Good which we taste and possess, we can neither grasp nor understand; neither can we enter into it by ourselves or by means of our exercises. And so we are poor in ourselves, but rich in God; hungry and thirsty in ourselves, drunken and fulfilled in God; busy in ourselves, idle in God. And thus we shall remain throughout eternity. But without the exercise of love, we can never possess God; and whosoever thinks or feels otherwise is deceived. And thus we live wholly in God, where we possess our blessedness; and we live wholly in ourselves, where we exercise ourselves in love towards God. And though we live wholly in God and wholly in ourselves, yet it is but one life; but it is twofold and opposite according to our feeling, for poor and rich, hungry and satisfied, busy and idle, these things are wholly contrary to one another. Yet with this our highest honour is bound up, now and in eternity: for we cannot wholly become God and lose our created being, this is impossible. Did we, however, remain wholly in ourselves, sundered from God, we should be miserable and unblest. And therefore we should feel ourselves living wholly in God and wholly in ourselves; and between these two feelings we should find nothing else but the grace of God and the exercise of our love. For out of our highest feeling, the brightness of God shines into us, which teaches us truth, and moves us towards every virtue and in eternal love towards God. If we follow this brightness

without pause, back into that Source from whence it comes forth, there we feel nothing but a quenching of our spirit and an irretrievable down-sinking into simple and fathomless love. Could we continue to dwell there with our simple gaze, we should always so feel it; for our immersion and transformation in God continues without ceasing in eternity, if we have gone forth from ourselves, and God is ours in the immersion of love. For if we possess God in the immersion of love - that is, if we are lost to ourselves - God is our own and we are His own: and we sink ourselves eternally and irretrievably in our own possession, which is God. This immersion is essential, and is closely bound up with the state of love: and so it continues whether we sleep or whether we wake, whether we know it or whether we know it not. And so it does not earn for us any new degree of reward; but it maintains us in the possession of God and of all that good which we have received. And this down-sinking is like a river, which without pause or turning back ever pours into the sea; since this is its proper resting-place. So likewise when we possess God alone, the down-sinking of our being, with the love that belongs to it flows forth, without return, into a fathomless experience which we possess, and which is our proper resting-place. Were we always simple, and could we always contemplate with the same recollection, we should always have the same experience. Now this immersion is above all virtues, and above every exercise of love; for it is nothing else than an eternal going out from ourselves, with a clear looking forward, into an otherness or difference towards which, outside ourselves, we tend as towards our blessedness. For we feel an eternal yearning toward something other than what we are ourselves. And this is the most inward and hidden distinction which we can feel between God and ourselves, and beyond it there is no difference any more. But our reason abides here with open eyes in the darkness, that is, in an abysmal ignorance; and in this darkness, the abysmal splendour remains covered

and hidden from us, for its overwhelming unfathomableness blinds our reason. But it enwraps us in simplicity, and transforms us through its selfhood: and thus we are brought forth by God, out of our selfhood, into the immersion of love, in which we possess blessedness, and are one with God.

When we are thus made one with God, there abides within us a quickening knowledge and an active love; for without our own knowledge, we cannot possess God; and without the practice of love, we cannot be united with God, nor remain one with Him. For if we could be blessed without our knowledge, then a stone, which has no knowledge, could also be blessed. Were I lord over all the world and knew it not, how would it profit me? And therefore we shall ever know and feel that we taste and possess; and this is testified by Christ Himself, where He speaks thus of us to His Father: This, he says, is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent. And by this you may understand that our eternal life consists in knowledge with discernment.

# **How We, Though One With God, Must Eternally Remain Other Than God**

Though I have said before that we are one with God and this is taught us by Holy Writ, yet now I will say that we must eternally remain other than God, and distinct from Him, and this too is taught us by Holy Writ. And we must understand and feel both within us, if all is to be right with us.

And therefore I say further: that from the Face of God, or from our highest feeling, a brightness shines upon the face of our inward being, which teaches us the truth of love and of all virtues: and especially are we taught in this brightness to feel God and ourselves in four ways. First, we feel God in His grace; and when we apprehend this, we cannot remain idle. For like as the sun, by its splendour and its heat, enlightens and gladdens and makes fruitful the whole world, so God does to us through His grace: He enlightens and gladdens and makes fruitful all men who desire to obey Him. If, however, we would feel God within us, and have the fire of His love ever more burning within us, we must, of our own free will, help to kindle it in four ways: We must abide within ourselves, united with the fire through inwardness. And we must go forth from ourselves towards all good men with loyalty and brotherly love. And we must go beneath ourselves in penance, betaking ourselves to all good works, and resisting our inordinate lusts. And we must ascend above ourselves with the flame of this fire, through devotion, and thanksgiving, and praise, and fervent prayer, and must ever cleave to God with an upright intention and with sensible love. And thereby God continues to dwell in us with His grace; for in these four ways is comprehended every exercise which we can do with the reason, and in some wise, but without this exercise no one can please God. And he who

is most perfect in this exercise, is nearest to God. And therefore it is needful for all men; and above it none can rise save the contemplative men. And thus, in this first way, we feel God within us through His grace, if we wish to belong to Him.

Secondly: when we possess the God-seeing life, we feel ourselves to be living in God; and from out of that life in which we feel God in ourselves, there shines forth upon the face of our inward being a brightness which enlightens our reason, and is an intermediary between ourselves and God. And if we with our enlightened reason abide within ourselves in this brightness, we feel that our created life incessantly immerses itself in its eternal life. But when we follow the brightness above reason with a simple sight, and with a willing leaning out of ourselves, toward our highest life, there we experience the transformation of our whole selves in God; and thereby we feel ourselves to be wholly enwrapped in God.

And, after this, there follows the third way of feeling; namely, that we feel ourselves to be one with God; for, through the transformation in God, we feel ourselves to be swallowed up in the fathomless abyss of our eternal blessedness, wherein we can nevermore find any distinction between ourselves and God. And this is our highest feeling, which we cannot experience in any other way than in the immersion in love. And therefore, so soon as we are uplifted and drawn into our highest feeling, all our powers stand idle in an essential fruition; but our powers do not pass away into nothingness, for then we should lose our created being. And as long as we stand idle, with an inclined spirit, and with open eyes, but without reflection, so long we can contemplate and have fruition. But, at the very moment in which we seek to prove and to comprehend what it is that we feel, we fall back into reason, and there we find a

distinction and an otherness between ourselves and God, and find God outside ourselves in incomprehensibility.

And hence the fourth way of distinction; which is, that we feel God and ourselves. Hereby we now find ourselves standing in the Presence of God; and the truth which we receive from the Face of God teaches us that God would be wholly ours and that He wills us to be wholly His. And in that same moment in which we feel that God would be wholly ours, there arises within us a gaping and eager craving which is so hungry and so deep and so empty that, even though God gave all that He could give, if he gave not Himself, we should not be appeased. For, whilst we feel that He has given Himself and yielded Himself to our untrammelled craving, that we may taste of Him in every way that we can desire - and of this we learn the truth in His sight - yet all that we taste, against all that we lack, is but like to a single drop of water against the whole sea: and this makes our spirit burst forth in fury and in the heat and the restlessness of love. For the more we taste, the greater our craving and our hunger; for the one is the cause of the other. And thus it comes about that we struggle in vain. For we feed upon His Immensity, which we cannot devour, and we yearn after His Infinity, which we cannot attain: and so we cannot enter into God nor can God enter into us, for in the untamed fury of love we are not able to renounce ourselves. And therefore the heat is so unmeasured that the exercise of love between ourselves and God flashes to and fro like the lightning in the sky; and yet we cannot be consumed in its ardour. And in this storm of love our activity is above reason and wayless; for love longs for that which is impossible to it, and reason teaches that love is in the right, but reason can neither counsel love nor dissuade her. For as long as we inwardly perceive that God would be ours, the goodness of God touches our eager craving: and therefrom springs the wildness of love, for the touch which pours forth from God

stirs up this wildness, and demands our activity, that is, that we should love eternal love. But the inward-drawing touch draws us out of ourselves, and calls us to be melted and noughted in the Unity. And in this inward-drawing touch, we feel that God wills us to be His; and therefore, we must renounce ourselves and leave Him to work our blessedness. But where He touches us by the outpouring touch, He leaves us to ourselves, and makes us free, and sets us in His Presence, and teaches us to pray in the spirit and to ask in freedom, and shows us His incomprehensible riches in such manifold ways as we are able to grasp. For everything that we can conceive, wherein is consolation and joy, this we find in Him without measure. And therefore, when our feeling shows us that He with all these riches would be ours and dwell in us for ever more, then all the powers of the soul open themselves, and especially the desirous power; for all the rivers of the grace of God pour forth, and the more we taste of them, the more we long to taste; and the more we long to taste, the more deeply we press into contact with Him; and the more deeply we press into contact with God, the more the flood of His sweetness flows through us and over us; and the more we are thus drenched and flooded, the better we feel and know that the sweetness of God is incomprehensible and unfathomable. And therefore the prophet says: O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet. But he does not say how sweet He is, for God's sweetness is without measure and therefore we can neither grasp it nor swallow it. And this is also testified by the bride of God in the Song of Songs, where she says: I sat down under his shadow, with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

## **Of the Great Difference Between the Brightness of the Saints and the Highest Brightness to Which We Can Attain in This Life**

There is a great difference between the brightness of the saints and the highest brightness or enlightenment to which we may attain in this life. For it is only the shadow of God which enlightens our inward wilderness, but on the high mountains of the Promised Land there is no shadow: and yet it is one and the same Sun, and one radiance, which enlightens both our wilderness and the high mountains. But the state of the saints is transparent and shining, and therefore they receive the brightness without intermediary: but our state is still mortal and gross, and this sets up an obstacle which causes the shadow, which so darkens our understanding that we cannot know God and heavenly things so clearly as the saints can and do. For as long as we dwell in the shadow, we cannot see the sun in itself; but Now we see through a glass darkly, says St Paul. Yet the shadow is so enlightened by the sunshine that we can perceive the distinctions between all the virtues, and all the truth which is profitable to our mortal state. But if we would become one with the brightness of the Sun, we must follow love, and go out of ourselves into the Wayless, and then the Sun will draw us with our blinded eyes into Its own brightness, in which we shall possess unity with God. So soon we feel and understand ourselves thus, we are in that contemplative life which is within reach of our mortal state.

The state of the Jews, according to the Old Testament, was cold and in the night, and they walked in darkness. And they Dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, says the prophet

Isaias. The shadow of death came forth from original sin; and therefore they had all to endure the lack of God. But though our state in the Christian faith is but still in the cool and morning hour; yet for us the day has dawned. And therefore we shall walk in the light, and shall sit down in the shadow, of God; and His grace shall be an intermediary between ourselves and God. And, through it, we shall overcome all things, and shall die to all things, and shall pass without hindrance into the unity of God. But the state of the saints is warm and bright; for they live and walk in the noon-tide, and see with open and enlightened eyes the brightness of the Sun, for the glory of God flows through them and overflows in them. And each one according to the degree of his enlightenment, tastes and knows the fruits of all the virtues which have there been gathered together by all spirits. But that they taste and know the Trinity in the Unity, and the Unity in the Trinity, and know themselves united therewith, this is the highest and all-surpassing food which makes them drunken, and causes them to rest in Its Selfhood. And This it was that the bride in the Book of Love desired, when she said unto Christ: Tell me, O thou Whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon, that is, in the light of glory, as St Bernard says; for all the food which is given to us here, in the morning hour and in the shadow, is but a foretaste of the food that is to come in the noon-tide of the glory of God.

Yet the bride of our Lord gloried in having sat under the shadow of God, and that His fruit was sweet to her taste. Whenever we feel that God touches us from within, we taste of His fruit and His food: for His touch is His food. And His touch is both indrawing and outpouring, as I have said before. In His indrawing, we must be wholly His: thereby we learn to die and to behold. But in His outpouring He wills to be wholly ours: and then He teaches us to live in the riches of the virtues. In His indrawing-touch all our powers forsake

us, and then we sit under His shadow, and His fruit is sweet to our taste, for the Fruit of God is the Son of God, Whom the Father brings forth in our spirit. This Fruit is so infinitely sweet to our taste that we can neither swallow It nor assimilate It, but It rather absorbs us into Itself and assimilates us with Itself. And whenever this Fruit draws us inward and touches us, we abandon, forsake, and overcome all other things. And in this overcoming of all things, we taste of the hidden manna, which shall give us eternal life; for we receive the sparkling stone, of which I have spoken heretofore, in which our new names were written before the beginning of the world.

This is the New name which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it. And whosoever feels himself to be for ever united with God, he possesses his name according to the measure of his virtues, and of his introversion, and of his union. And, that every one may obtain his name and possess it in eternity, the Lamb of God, that is, the manhood of our Lord, has delivered Itself up to death; and has opened for us the Book of Life, wherein are written all the names of the elect. And these names cannot be blotted out, for they are one with the Living Book, which is the Son of God. And that same death has broken for us the seals of the Book, so that all virtues may be fulfilled according to the eternal Providence of God. And so, in the measure in which each man can overcome himself, and can die to all things, he feels the touch of the Father drawing him inward; and then he tastes the sweetness of the Inborn Fruit, Which is the Son; and in this tasting the Holy Ghost teaches him that he is the heir of God. But in these three points no one is like to another in every respect. And therefore each one has been named separately, and his name is continually made new through new graces and new works of virtue. And therefore every knee shall bow before the Name of Jesus, for He has fought for our sake, and has conquered. And He has

enlightened our darkness, and has fulfilled all the virtues in the highest degree. And so His name is lifted up above all other names, for He is the King and the Prince over all the elect. And in His name we are called and chosen, and adorned with grace and with virtues, and look for the glory of God.

# **Of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Thabor**

And so, that the Name of Christ may be exalted and glorified in us, we should follow Him up the mountain of our bare intelligence, even as Peter, James and John followed Him on to mount Thabor. Thabor means in our tongue an increase of light. So soon as we are like Peter in knowledge of truth, and like James in the overcoming of the world, and like John in fulness of grace possessing the virtues in righteousness; then Jesus brings us up on to the mountain of our bare intelligence to a hidden solitude, and reveals Himself to us in glory and in Divine brightness. And, in His name, His Father in heaven opens to us the living book of His Eternal Wisdom. And the Wisdom of God enfolds our bare vision and the simplicity of our spirit in a wayless, simple fruition of all good without distinction; and here there are indeed seeing and knowing, tasting and feeling, essence and life, having and being: and all this is one in our transcendence in God. And before this transcendence we are all set, each in his own particular way; and our heavenly Father, of His wisdom and goodness, endows each one in particular according to the nobility of his life and his practice. And therefore, if we ever remained with Jesus on mount Thabor, that is, upon the mountain of our bare thought, we should continually experience a growth of new light and new truth; for we should ever hear the voice of the Father, Who touches us, pouring forth with grace, and drawing us inward into the unity. The voice of the Father is heard by all who follow our Lord Jesus Christ, for He says of them all: "These are My chosen sons, in whom I am well pleased." And, through this good pleasure, each one receives grace, according to the measure and the way in which God is well-pleasing unto him. And therefrom, between our pleasure in God, and God's

pleasure in us, there arises the practice of true love. And so each one tastes of his name and his office and the fruit of his exercise. And here all good men abide, hidden from those who live in the world; for these are dead before God and have no name, and therefore they can neither feel nor taste that which belongs to those who live indeed.

The outpouring touch of God quickens us with life in the spirit, and fulfills us with grace, and enlightens our reason, and teaches us to know truth and to discern the virtues, and keeps us stable in the Presence of God, with such a great strength that we are able to endure all the tasting, all the feeling, and all the outpouring gifts of God without our spirits failing us. But the indrawing-touch of God demands of us, that we should be one with God, and go forth from ourselves, and die into blessedness, that is, into the Eternal Love Which embraces the Father and the Son in one fruition. And therefore when we have climbed with Jesus on to the mountain of our bare thought; and if, then, we follow Him with a single and simple gaze, with inward pleasure, and with fruitive inclination, we feel the fierce heat of the Holy Ghost, burning and melting us into the Unity of God. For when we are one with the Son, and lovingly return towards our Beginning, then we hear the voice of the Father, touching us and drawing us inward; for He says to all His chosen in His Eternal Word: This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. For you should know that the Father with the Son, and the Son with the Father, have conceived an eternal satisfaction in regard to this: that the Son should take upon Himself our manhood, and die, and bring back all the chosen to their Beginning.

And so soon as we are uplifted through the Son into our Origin, we hear the voice of the Father, which draws us inward, and enlightens us with eternal truth. And truth shows to us the wide-opened good-pleasure of God, in which

all good-pleasure begins and ends. There all our powers fail us, and we fall from ourselves into our wide-opened contemplation, and become all One and one All, in the loving embrace of the Threefold Unity. Whenever we feel this union, we are one being and one life and one blessedness with God. And there all things are fulfilled and all things are made new; for when we are baptized into the wide embrace of the Love of God, the joy of each one of us becomes so great and so special that he can neither think of nor care for the joy of anyone else; for then each one is himself a Fruition of Love, and he cannot and dare not seek for anything beyond his own.

# How We Ought to Have Fruition of God

If a man would have fruition of God, three things are needful thereto; these are, true peace, inward silence, and loving adherence.

Whosoever would find true peace between himself and God must love God in such a way that he can, with a free heart, renounce for the glory of God everything which he does or loves inordinately, or which he possesses, or can possess, contrary to the glory of God. This is the first thing which is needful to all men.

The second thing is an inward silence; that is, that a man should be empty and free from images of all things which he ever saw or of which he ever heard.

The third thing is a loving adherence to God, and this adherence is itself fruition; for whosoever cleaves to God out of pure love, and not for his own profit, he enjoys God in truth, and feels that he loves God and that God loves him.

There are still three other points, which are higher still, and which establish a man and make him able to enjoy and to feel God continually, if it be His good will to have it so.

The first of these points is to rest in Him Whom one enjoys; that is, where love is overcome by the lover, and love is taken possession of by the lover, in bare Essential Love. There love has fallen in love with the lover, and each is all to the other, in possession and in rest.

From this there follows the second: and this is called a falling asleep in God; that is, when the spirit immerses itself, and

knows not how, nor where, nor in what it is.

And therefrom follows the last point that can be put into words, that is, when the spirit beholds a Darkness into which it cannot enter with the reason. And there it feels itself dead and lost to itself, and one with God without difference and without distinction. And when it feels itself one with God, then God Himself is its peace and its enjoyment and its rest. And this is an unfathomable abyss wherein man must die to himself in blessedness, and must live again in virtues, whenever love and its stirring demand it. Lo! if you feel these six points within you, then you feel all that I have, or could have, said before. And introversion is as easy to you, and contemplation and fruition are as ready to you, as your life according to nature. And from these riches there comes that common life of which I promised to speak to you at the beginning.

## **That Common Life Which Comes from the Contemplation and Fruition of God**

The man who is sent down by God from these heights into the world is full of truth and rich in all virtues. And he seeks not his own but the glory of Him Who has sent him. And hence he is just and truthful in all things, and he possesses a rich and a generous ground, which is set in the richness of God: and therefore he must always spend himself on those who have need of him; for the living fount of the Holy Ghost, which is his wealth, can never be spent. And he is a living and willing instrument of God, with which God works whatsoever He wills and howsoever He wills; and these works he reckons not as his own, but gives all the glory to God. And so he remains ready and willing to do in the virtues all that God commands, and strong and courageous in suffering and enduring all that God allows to befall him. And by this he possesses a universal life, for he is ready alike for contemplation and for action, and is perfect in both of them. And none can have this universal life save the God-seeing man; and none can contemplate and enjoy God save he who has within himself the six points, ordered as I have described heretofore. And therefore, all those are deceived who fancy themselves to be contemplative, and yet inordinately love, practice, or possess, some creaturely thing; or who fancy that they enjoy God before they are empty of images, or that they rest before they enjoy. All such are deceived; for we must make ourselves fit for God with an open heart, with a peaceful conscience, with naked contemplation, without hypocrisy, in sincerity and truth. And then we shall mount up from virtue unto virtue, and shall see God, and shall enjoy Him, and in Him shall become one with Him, in the way which I have shown to you. That this be done in all of us, so help us God. Amen.

## About This EBook

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